



Audubon | NEBRASKA

2021 Summer Newsletter



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Who We Are

Audubon Nebraska operates statewide from an office in Omaha and through two nature centers and wildlife sanctuaries, Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center and Iain Nicolson Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary, to protect birds and the places they need, today and tomorrow.



Director's Corner

by Kristal Stoner

Recently our team discussed an interesting topic: what bird describes the “ethos” of our team? It was an interesting conversation given the wide array of talent and accomplishments of the team. We have educators that inspire wonder in children, habitat managers using fire to rejuvenate the grassland, volunteers stewarding our trails and welcoming guests, scientists counting birds to understand how our changing world impacts them and leaders bringing resources from across Nebraska to solve our environmental challenges. The answers were insightful and delightful!

Upland Sandpiper because this grassland bird is highly nimble, adaptable and flexible and moves to opportunity. Where grasslands become fragmented with agriculture and homes, this bird finds suitable grasslands and thrives.

Sandhill Crane because they stand tall, dance and proudly perform for crowds of people. Our educators and volunteers are anxiously waiting for the crowds to come back so they can similarly captivate audiences!

Eastern Bluebird because they are often displaced by the more aggressive house sparrow, and this year we were all kicked out of our homes (offices) by COVID-19 and had to relocate!

Cedar Waxwing because after a year of separation, we understand how efficient we can be alone but also that we are a tight flock and are ready for the positive energy that flows when we are together again.

The reoccurring theme was clear. Just as migrating birds sing their excitement at returning home from their winter grounds, our team is excited for the possibilities this summer will bring. Come visit us soon!

Faces of Audubon

● Spring Creek Prairie ● Rowe Sanctuary
● State Office



Kristal Stoner - Executive Director

Kristal oversees Audubon Nebraska with two centers as hubs of activity for statewide strategic bird conservation. She lays the groundwork to address new conservation challenges including drought, habitat loss and climate change.



Allison Christenson - Communications Coordinator

Allison handles all communications-related duties for Audubon Nebraska while assisting the two Audubon centers.



Meghan Sittler - Director

Meghan oversees the care and management of SCPAC. She has a close connection to the prairie; her parents farmed land near SCPAC where her sister and brother-in-law now farm.



Amy Plettner - Caretaker

Amy has been with SCPAC for 12 years as caretaker and outdoor educator. Her poetry has been published in a variety of anthologies and journals.



Jason "the Birdnerd" St. Sauver - Senior Education Manager

Jason oversees the planning and delivery of all education programs for SCPAC, working with staff to provide quality nature experiences for all.



Kevin Poague - Operations Manager

Kevin has been the operations manager for SCPAC since 1998. He assists with education programs and helps conduct prairie bird surveys during breeding season.



Andrea Bornemeier - Educator/Volunteer Coordinator

Andrea helps coordinate and facilitate school, youth, and public programs and oversees the volunteer program at SCPAC.



Ed Hubbs - Habitat & Private Lands Manager

Ed oversees the planning and execution of on-site habitat management, and works with local landowners and resource professionals to promote conservation-minded land stewardship in the region.



Cacey Wilken - Conservation Field Technician

Cacey oversees SCPAC's GIS projects and monitoring efforts and assists with habitat management and conservation initiatives on the tallgrass prairie.



Lizzy Gilbert - Director of Development

Lizzy manages a comprehensive development program in Nebraska that supports the Central Flyway conservation initiatives, including Audubon Nebraska and the two centers.



Victoria Lyons - Development Associate

Victoria assists in securing donations to support our work across the state, working closely with both centers and our statewide program leadership.



Melissa Mosier - Platte River Program Manager

Melissa works to organize and expand conservation efforts throughout the Platte River watershed in Nebraska, Colorado, and Wyoming.



Bill Taddicken - Director

Bill leads and oversees all Rowe Sanctuary programs and has worked extensively on conservation of the Platte River for Sandhill Cranes, Whooping Cranes, and other wildlife.



Rebekah Yates - Education Manager

Beka oversees all education programming at Rowe including school, adult, and family programs and summer camps.



Cody Wagner - Conservation Program Manager

Cody maintains the conservation programs at Rowe Sanctuary.



Soncey Kondrotis - Office Manager

Soncey oversees day-to-day management of Rowe Sanctuary.



Anne Winkel - Community Outreach Coordinator

Anne is the coordinator for Rowe Sanctuary's community outreach.



Amanda Hegg - Conservation Program Associate

Amanda helps maintain habitat and implements various science and conservation initiatives at Rowe Sanctuary.



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Our Opposition to the Platte River Water Transfer

A hearing date has been set for Audubon to defend its legal standing to protect the Platte River and streamflow that important bird species, as well as many of Nebraska's citizens, rely upon. The State of Nebraska is currently considering a proposal for an interbasin transfer that would divert water from the Platte River upstream from Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary and move it to the Republican River Basin. This means that in some years, streamflow that helps build and maintain the habitat on the Platte River that species such as the Sandhill and Whooping Cranes prefer will be missing.

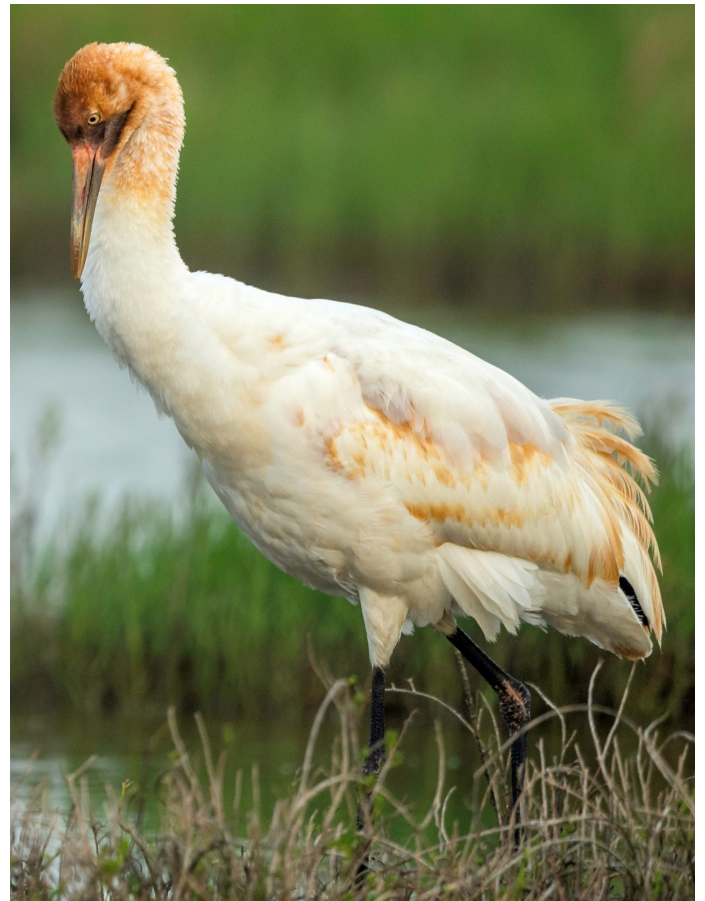
Community and agricultural water supplies that are connected to groundwater aquifers may see a decline with reduced groundwater recharge, or replenishment of the aquifer from streamflow that seeps into the ground. As any Nebraskan whose livelihood depends on water can tell you, protecting both surface and groundwater supplies is essential to ensuring that our communities thrive now and into the future.

Audubon resubmitted a legal objection to the proposed Platte-Republican interbasin transfer last year, and in response, the sponsors of the project have submitted a motion to dismiss Audubon's objection, claiming a lack of standing. The Nebraska Department of Natural Resources, the state agency responsible for reviewing, approving, or denying surface water right applications, has announced that a hearing on the motion to dismiss Audubon's objection to the interbasin transfer will be held in the summer of 2021.

So far in Nebraska's history, a transfer of surface water from one river basin to another has not been approved as a means of dealing with a shortage in water supply. Instead, Nebraskans have determined that water management decisions should be made at a local scale, by those who have an intimate understanding of the environmental and social implications of allocating water to one use over another. Those who live and work near the Platte River recognize that every drop of water in the basin has value.

Because streamflow in the Platte River has decreased to such a great extent over the past century, it is all the more important that we protect what water remains for the ecosystems and communities that depend on it. The environmental community and other water users in the Basin have been working collaboratively for decades to manage the Platte River in a way that is beneficial to everyone's interests. This diversion would be a step backward in those efforts and could reduce the certainty we have in our future water supplies.

As our water resources come under more pressure from increasing demand and shifting availability in time and location due to climate change, it will be even more important that we make decisions about water use that will bolster ecological, cultural, and economic resilience. Audubon Nebraska will continue to protect the water that remains in the Platte River because it is essential to protecting Platte River habitat, birds, and our local communities.





Support during COVID-19: Thank You!

It's been a difficult year for so many and Audubon was not immune. We had to quickly rethink our education programs, volunteering, and basically everything we had planned to keep staff, volunteers and supporters safe. We are incredibly thankful for our staff's flexibility in implementing virtual opportunities to keep all of us connected.

But all of this work would not have been possible without you. The support we've received during the pandemic is more than we ever could have expected, and we can't express how grateful we are. Without your continued support through online donations, attending programs, and/or volunteering, this conservation work for birds and other wildlife would go undone. From everyone at Audubon, thank you.

Keep an eye on the Spring Creek Prairie and Rowe Sanctuary event pages on their websites for future opportunities to connect in person again.



Recent Policy Wins

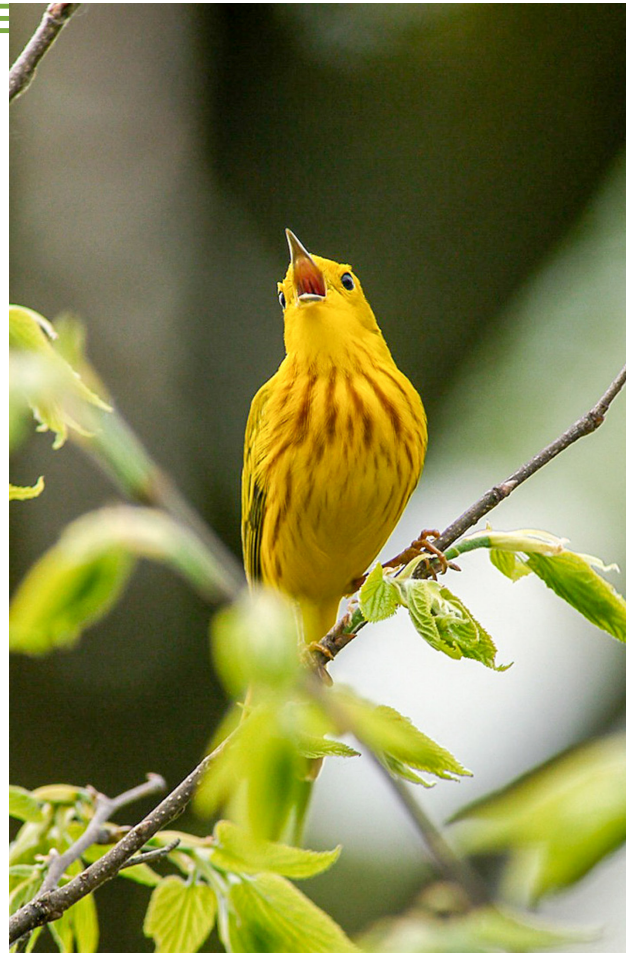
Throughout the year, we sent in letters of support and of opposition for numerous state and federal policies. These proposals address a wide range of issues from the climate crisis to discrimination to tax payments. After a whirlwind year, we were glad to see a few proposals pass (or be killed) at the local and state level.

One such proposal was for a Climate Action Plan in the city of Lincoln, NE. The city council voted in favor of creating a plan to combat the climate crisis city-wide, a major win for climate and local wildlife.

Another bill we supported (LB507) was introduced in response to reports of pesticide-treated corn seed being used to create agricultural ethyl alcohol. As with all energy production, generation facilities must be able to properly dispose of waste products and do so in a manner that prevents environmental contamination. Very few facilities in the nation use treated corn or corn treated with insecticides, and doing so presents a significant and unnecessary disposal challenge that threatens wildlife.

Finally, a bill we were opposed to was defeated. LB222 called for additional provisions relating to in lieu of tax payments by the Game and Parks Commission; changes that are unnecessary and would add significant complexity, inconsistency, and undue administrative burden annually. The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission already pays an in lieu of tax payment on wildlife lands that have been acquired since 1977. Thankfully, this bill failed.

If you want to know more about the other local and federal bills we support, visit ne.audubon.org/policy-statements.





Audubon

Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center



Partnering around Plants for Birds

A main strategy in Audubon's Bird-Friendly Communities initiative is the Plants for Birds program, which aims to bring native plants to sub/urban yards and green spaces for birds, insects, and people. Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center has several Plants for Birds projects underway or recently finished. One was a successful partnership with the local Wachiska Audubon Society. Wachiska has had a bird feeder project with the Lincoln City Libraries for many years. This year, with the help of SCPAC and many amazing volunteers, the chapter expanded and enhanced the bird feeding area at the Bess Dodson Walt Branch Library by adding nearly 300 native plants, mulch, new bird feeders, and educational signs. There are also plans for benches for people to enjoy the native plant garden and host educational programs. The project was funded by a PIE grant from the Nebraska Environmental Trust received by Wachiska.

Spring Creek Prairie also has continuing Plants for Birds projects going at Van Dorn Park in Lincoln as well as a native plant tour event, "Tour the Wild Side", planned for August 21 & 22 with Wachiska.



Education News

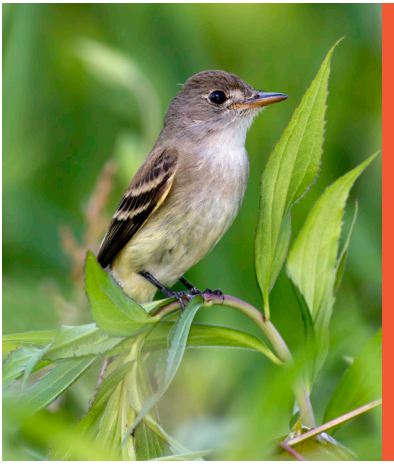
Audubon Bird Kits

Because of colder temperatures and concerns around COVID-19, late winter and early spring programming at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center focused on providing activities online or at home for audiences. A highlight was mailing over 200 Audubon Adventure Kits to young participants and their families not able to attend their usual afterschool programming with our partners from the Lincoln Community Learning Centers (CLCs). These kits were filled with activity booklets, exploration tools, and toys themed around participating in the Great Backyard Bird Count in February. Additional supplies focusing on Sandhill Cranes and art went out in March. The project was funded through a local grant with the CLCs.

Summer Camps

SCPAC looks forward to welcoming small youth groups from four CLC sites for a week each of summer day-camp programming. Outdoor exploration will include prairie investigations, nature journaling, wetland and water quality fun, and free time in nature for youth to find their own special connections to the prairie.





Visitor Center Back to Regular Hours

After closing for months in 2020 and having temporary hours this year, the visitor center at Spring Creek Prairie is now open for its new regular hours, Monday through Friday 8:30 am-4:30 pm, and Saturday and Sunday 8:30 am-12:30 pm. Our hours have changed slightly from previous years, opening earlier on weekdays and in the mornings on weekends, with the hopes of interacting with more people, especially during the hot summer months.

Admission is free, and the Center's trails are open as always from sunrise to sunset seven days a week. We have also begun taking rental reservations for weddings, meetings, parties, etc.



Prescribed fire is done for the spring... now what?

Visitors to Spring Creek Prairie this spring and early summer likely saw staff and volunteers in yellow Nomex®, which is a special fabric worn by firefighters and many of our crew members when conducting prescribed burns. Prescribed burning at SCPAC takes a pause in the months of May and June, but Mother Nature does not take any time off. So what do our staff and volunteers do after they take off the Nomex®?

Some tasks are best accomplished immediately after a burn. Because the heavy thatch layer of dead grass has been removed, this is a great time to over-seed with native seeds to add plant diversity to an area. Depending on the time of year and overall management goals, we move cattle onto many of our areas soon after burning. This mimics what would naturally occur in the wild with large herbivores following fresh re-growth after a fire or other disturbance. This year was no different as we put cattle



into the burned area within weeks of having conducted the prescribed burn. While no Nomex® was involved, staff and volunteers set up about one mile of temporary electric fence, and inspected/repared more than a mile of permanent barbed wire fence.

The fence inspections, repairs, and rotations will continue throughout the growing season as cattle are moved around as part of our prairie management.

After getting burn gear and equipment cleaned and stored, and establishing fence and water tanks for cattle, staff will turn their attention toward invasive species management. Regular volunteers will be familiar with the “cut and dab” approach of cutting invasive woody trees at ground level and dabbing them with herbicide to prevent regrowth.

Another “popular” volunteer event aimed at combating invasive species are the thistle digs, in which we target the invasive musk thistle to prevent it from taking over the prairie by out-competing desirable species. Although initially daunting, this work can be extremely rewarding as you are literally improving the health of the prairie with each scoop of your shovel. Those who are interested in helping us in prairie management should contact us at scp@audubon.org or call 402-797-2301.





Audubon

Iain Nicolson
Audubon Center
at Rowe Sanctuary



Summer Conservation Opportunities

Audubon staff are preparing for a busy field season at Rowe Sanctuary. Science and monitoring efforts are essential support for the management done every year to ensure that those habitat actions are creating positive change for the wildlife that live here. Habitat management and monitoring complement one another and there are plenty of opportunities to lend a hand for both.

Audubon's Climate Watch survey took place in May and June across the country and at Rowe. This community science bird survey is one of the best ways to help contribute to research into our changing climate. You can find information on how to get involved by contacting your area Climate Watch coordinator using Audubon's website audubon.org/climate-watch.

Staff and volunteers will spend part of the summer digging out invasive musk thistles from our prairies. Let us know if you'd like to help out. See parts of Rowe Sanctuary few get to see and enjoy the instant gratification of immediately improving a part of our prairies.

Seed collection, butterfly surveys, tree cutting and more are planned as the summer goes on so watch for announcements both in email and on social media for new opportunities!



If you are interested in being a long-term conservation volunteer, join our volunteer conservation team! We will work with you to build a volunteering schedule, many volunteers like to pick a consistent day of week. Help with specific monitoring/habitat projects with our staff or take ownership of your own project. Training will be provided. If you are looking for a way to enjoy nature and give back to the wildlife you love this summer, our volunteer conservation team might be the right fit for you.



Visitor Center Hours

The Visitor Center at Rowe Sanctuary is now open to the public Monday through Friday from 10 am-4 pm. Visitors can come in and talk to a staff member about the sanctuary and its wildlife, and browse our gift store for some fun crane-themed items for purchase. Face masks are not required in the center for fully vaccinated individuals. After stopping in the center, visitors can take a walk along one of the walking trails, which are open every day from dawn to dusk. So come on out and explore the sanctuary!



Summer Education Programs

As we look to the rest of summer, we are excited to move toward more in-person programming to get people out in nature. For example, our Platte River Safari Camps will take place in June and July. These camps are for any student currently in grades 2 through 5 for the 2020-2021 school year. This is a nature day camp where children can learn about the Platte River and other natural areas at Rowe. Campers take part in a variety of hands-on activities including natural and physical science, language arts, history, agriculture, music and art. Campers participate in activities not normally offered during the school year like getting wet and muddy – all for the sake of learning!

Flying Higher will take place July 13-15, 2021. This camp is a hands-on, ecology camp geared for kids currently in grades 6 through 8 for the 2020-2021 school year. This camp will take campers into the realm of scientific surveys and identification with a huge dose of fun.

This year, each camp session will be limited to 15 campers and will run from 8:30 am-3:30 pm Tuesday-Thursday. Campers must bring a sack lunch and a mask every day. We share the belief that when children spend quality time outside it can have a lasting, positive impact on their personal lives and the future of our great natural heritage. Registration is open and spots are quickly filling up!

In addition to summer camps, we are conducting our monthly Wildflower Walk Wednesdays. This program will take place the third Wednesday of each month from May-September. We are trying out a hybrid program so people in the area can attend the free walk in person, but we will also be streaming the walk to the Rowe Sanctuary Facebook page for everyone to enjoy at home.



Prairie Rose
(*rosa arkansana*)



Wild Columbine
(*aquilegia canadensis*)



A Safe, Successful Crane Season

As the first few hopeful signs of spring began creeping their way north, novice and experienced birders alike flocked to Rowe Sanctuary to experience the Sandhill Crane migration. Although previous years attracted around 25,000 visitors, with this year being so trying, we were excited to see around 3,000 visitors come out to meander along the Sanctuary's trails. One couple stopped in to stretch their legs while on route to their university for the spring semester, and said they would definitely head this way again. Another, with three young children skipping down the trail, "needed a break from online school!"

Rowe was an oasis in our lives this year, for those near and far—375

people tuned in to our virtual crane tours, and over 300,000 views of our live crane camera.

We hosted 564 guests for crane viewing experiences, both in overnight blinds and on guided tours. Some people were local, some returning visitors from across the country, and some international tourists who had only seen Rowe online. Thanks to the hard work of our volunteers and staff, we were still able to engage our visitors this year in a meaningful way with the important work we do conserving habitat for cranes. A warm thank you to our dedicated volunteers, Audubon staff, partners, and donors, for helping us continue to provide sanctuary for wildlife and visitors for years to come.

Thank you to the following corporate sponsors:

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Platte River Recovery Implementation Program
Sandhills Publishing
The Archway
Wells Fargo
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How You Can Help

Make a Cash or Online Donation

Money orders or checks can be mailed to centers directly or you can donate online.

Sign up for Audubon Nebraska's eNews

By signing up for our eNews, you will receive Audubon Nebraska and center updates plus so much more!

Volunteer

Call or email either center for information on volunteering.

Contribute to Science

Audubon offers opportunities to get involved in community science projects. Read more at

9 audubon.org/science.

Audubon Centers & State Office

Audubon Nebraska

New Omaha office location pending
nebraska@audubon.org
www.ne.audubon.org

Iain Nicolson Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary

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scp@audubon.org
www.springcreek.audubon.org

Audubon Chapters

Audubon Society of Omaha

PO Box 3542, Omaha, NE 68103
(402) 445-4138
Nebraska Bird Line (402) 721-5487
www.audubon-omaha.org

Wachiska Audubon Society

4547 Calvert St, Suite 10, Lincoln, NE 68506
(402) 486-4846
office@wachiskaaudubon.org
www.wachiskaaudubon.org

Wildcat Audubon Society

170188 Spring Creek Rd, Mitchell, NE 69357
www.wyoneb.net/-delara/WildcatAudubon

Photo Credits

Front Cover

Great Blue Heron. Photo: James Robellard/Audubon
Photography Awards

Page 1

American Coot. Photo: Rachel Spencer/Audubon
Photography Awards

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Whooping Crane. Photo: Elaine Brackin/Audubon
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Ruby-throated Hummingbird. Photo: Mike Fernandez/
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Yellow Warbler. Photo: Dale Bonk/Audubon Photography
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Northern Bobwhite. Photo: Myrna Erler Bradshaw/
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Willow Flycatcher. Photo: Kelly Colgan Azar/Flickr CC BY-
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Volunteers Linda and Barb. Photo: Cody Wagner/Audubon

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Common Merganser. Photo: Beverly McNeil/Audubon
Photography Awards

Page 8

Sandhill Crane. Photo: Jason Kandume/Audubon
Photography Awards

Back Cover

Green Heron. Photo: John Terry/Audubon Photography
Awards

